

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL SYDNEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4901

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 2357

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, AS

SUBJ: ELECTRIC POWER BROWN-OUT IN SYDNEY

REF: SYDNEY 2331 AND 2352

SUMMARY: ELECTRIC POWER BROWN-OUT CONTINUES AS NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT REJECTS PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S OFFER TO PROVIDE FEDERAL CONCILIATOR. POWER RATIONING TO BEGIN OCTOBER 7 THREATENS LARGE LABOR LAYOFFS. LABOR COUNCIL REPORTEDLY SEEKING A FACE-SAVING WAY OUT, PERHAPS BY ENDING THE INDUSTRIAL ACTION AND SHIFTING TO POLITICAL ACTION AIMED AT NEXT STATE ELECTIONS.

1. THE NEW SOUTH WALES ELECTRIC POWER BROWN OUT CONTINUES AND SHOWS SIGNS OF WORSENING-FOLLOWING THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S REJECTION OF THE LABOR UNION'S COMPROMISE PROPOSAL OF A 37 1/2 HOUR WEEK, PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM CANCELED THE UNION AND PREMIER ASKIN OFFERING "TO ASK A PRESIDENTIAL MEMBER OF THE CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION COMMISSION TO PRESIDE AT A CONFERENCE OF BOTH PARTIES OR TO ACT AS AN ARBITRATOR." PREDICTABLY, THE LABOR COUNCIL ACCEPTED AND PREMIER ASKIN REJECTED THIS OFFER. WITH THE
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PROSPECT OF INCREASED BLACKOUTS, MINSTER OF MINES AND

POWER FIFE ANNOUNCED THAT POWER RATIONING WOULD BEGIN MIDNIGHT SUNDAY. THIS IN TURN WILL PROBABLY LEAD TO LARGE SCALE LAYOFFS IN NEW SOUTH WALES, THEREBY SCREWING THE DISPUTE UP ANOTHER NOTCH, SPREADING THE PUBLIC IMPACT AND INTENSIFYING THE POLITICAL TEST OF STRENGTH.

2. IN A PRIVATE CONVERSATION, A MEMBER OF THE NEWSOUTH WALES LABOR COUNCIL SAID QUITE FRANKLY THAT THE COUNCIL IS TRYING TO FIND A FACE-SAVING WAY OUT OF THIS DISPUTE WHICH CANNOT BE WON AT THIS TIME AND A CONTINUATION OF WHICH ONLY HURTS THE LABOR PARTY FEDERALLY AS WELL AS IN THE STATE. THIS WAS THE REASON FOR THE BACKDOWN FROM A 35 TO A 37 1/2 HOUR WEEK DEMAND. HOWEVER, PREMIER ASKIN IS IN MUCH TOO STRONG A POSITION TO ACQUIESCE IN SUCH A COMPROMISE WHICH WOULD IN FACT UNDERMINE THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION WHICH RESTS UPON THE APPLICATION OF THE INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION'S JUDGMENT WHICH IS AGAINST SHORTENING THE 40 HOUR WEEK AT THIS TIME. THE LABOR COUNCIL PLANS TO SEEK ANOTHER COMPROMISE MEETING WITH PREMIER ASKIN NEXT MONDAY EVENING WHICH WILL PROBABLY FAIL. THEREAFTER THERE IS STRONG SUPPORT IN THE LABOR COUNCIL FOR CONVINCING THE UNIONS TO GO BACK TO A FULL-TIME SCHEDULE TO SHIFT THEIR CAMPAIGN FOR THE 35 HOUR WEEK FROM INDUSTRIAL TO POLITICAL ACTION; THAT IS TO SEEK A LABLR PARTY VICTORY IN THE NEXT STATE ELECTION WHICH IT IS BELEIVED ASKIN WILL HOLD DURING NOVEMBER. UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, LABOR PARTY COULD NOT REPEAT NOT WIN SUCH AN ELECTION AND WOULD PROBABLY EMERGE WEAKER THAN AT PRESENT, BUT THE DEFEAT WOULD RESULT IN AN INTERNAL SHAKE-UP WITHIN THE STATE LABOR PARTY IN WHICH THE WELL LIKED BUT INEFFECTIVE LEADER PAT HILLS WHOULD BE REPLACED BY THE MORE VIGOROUS NEVILLE WRAN.
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